



Master of Ceremonies Jim Fagan presents the first place trophy to the Venerable Villagers team of Pat Kelly, Mary Ennis, and Delia Briggs

"Venerable Villagers" Topple Competition in First DEF Spelling Bee

By PAULA MAXWELL

A retired lawyer, teacher and proofreader proved that the "Villagers at Duxbury" have a way with words, toppling their 52-team competition last week in the first-ever community-wide spelling bee.

The successful fundraiser to benefit the Duxbury Education Foundation raised \$16,000 to help support educational programs in the schools.

Calling their team the "Venerable Villagers", the trio of residents from Duxbury's se-

nior living community, 84-year old Patrick Kelly, 77-year old Mary Ennis, and 82-year old Delia Briggs finally topped their last competitors two hours into the event with the

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correct spelling of 'philippic' (any oration full of hostile invective).

The other finalist, Demos Consulting Group, went valiantly down to defeat adding one "l" too many on the fateful word, after hurdling such obstacles as prolegomenon, schottische and strigil.

"Our only problem was in hearing the words," said Kelly, who wears a hearing aid. "Mary has the best ears, so she was a good captain."

The team was up to the challenge as they bested 156 other opponents to become champions.

It wasn't until the winners were crowned after a great ovation from the crowd at the Duxbury Middle School gym and presented with a first DEF spelling bee trophy and sterling bee pins that word got around that Pat Kelly was a "ringer" or should we say "stinger" of sorts.

It was 74-years ago at age nine that he was presented a medal at the White House from then President Calvin Coolidge as Connecticut's state spelling champion. One of the top ten spellers in the country's first national spelling bee, Kelly appeared with his teammates and the President in a photo in a 1923 edition of the *New York Times*.

"This was a real team effort," said the retired lawyer, who along with teammates Ennis and Briggs tackled a total of 18 words on their path to glory.

Spelling bee Co-Chairmen Jane Wallace and Laura Carleton began recruiting the 60 volunteers and organizing the fundraiser a year ago. They were both pleased with the town's response.

"It was just unbelievable; a real community effort," said Carleton. "Little kids were cheering on their teachers, or parents. Business people and co-workers turned out. All ages and interests were represented. And it was fun."

Over 200 people were on hand as competitors tackled words such as vinaigrette, carmagnole, jodhpur and other stumbers.

Teams representing businesses, teachers, organizations, and neighborhoods entered within eight rounds of competing "hives". Wearing hats, T-shirts, medical scrubs, and other unique signature outfits, teams hammed it up in a gymnasium decorated with "bee" themes as volunteers in costume panned the crowd.

Those attending were treated to alphabet soup, clam chowder, salad and rolls, along with assorted beverages, all donated by local business people. T-shirts and other souvenirs were also on sale.

Some of the teams represented included: the Chandler Champions, the Alden Attack-

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ers, the Alphabats, the Spell Doctors, the Bodacious Loquacious Librarians, the Magic Spells, and the Ashdod Spellers.

Both the Board of Selectmen and the Clipper Crew teams went down to defeat on "sibilant", spelling it with a "y" instead of an "i".

Master of Ceremonies Jim Fagan kept the event moving with his witty delivery marked by such one liners as, "Our first word is Duxbury. If you get this wrong, you have to move to Marshfield."

Judges included Dr. John Kerrigan, Asst. Supt. of Schools, Don Beers, Duxbury Harbormaster, Lyell Franke of the Wordmaster Committee, and Josh Cutler, Editor, *Duxbury Clipper*.

The enthusiasm of the crowd was infectious with children waving yellow bee streamers. Each team seemed to have its following and respective cheering section. But when it came down to the final three, the Villagers, Demos Consulting and Battelle, there was no question the Villagers were the crowd favorites.

The celebration for the eventual winners continued at the senior living community last week with no doubt who the resident king and queen bees were. On Friday night, the spelling acers were feted at the Village's monthly cocktail reception with a champagne toast, ivy crowns and other honors.

Residents at the Village actually had their own in-house spelling bee prior to the big event so the large contingent who showed up to support their friends knew their Villager team was up to the task.

As first place winner of the Village bee, Ennis, a retired proofreader of medical texts had the honor of being team captain. Briggs is a retired teacher and Kelly is a retired attorney for Liberty Mutual. All three are readers who enjoy crossword puzzles and word games.

At the end of the night, organizers and spectators agreed the Villagers were amazing spellers and deserving victors.

"The oldest team turned out to be the best," observed 8th grader Emily Hopkins who summed up the feelings of the crowd. "That's just so great."